

HB 6205 Testimony, 6/30/10  
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Good afternoon, and thank you for your time today. My name is Adam London. I am a sanitarian and I am here today to represent the Michigan Environmental Health Association. Before I continue, I would like to introduce two terms which I've already mentioned but which may be new to you. These two terms are "sanitarian" and "environmental health." While these may be unfamiliar terms, I guarantee that you have been affected by them in countless ways. The water you drink, sanitary disposal of wastes, the breakfast you ate, the lunch you are waiting to eat. Hopefully, over this holiday weekend, you will have a chance to hang out at the pool or a campground or maybe even at your favorite tattoo parlor. The safety of all these places, and more, is assured by sanitarians.

A sanitarian is a scientist and a public health professional protecting our citizens and our families from harms present in the manmade or natural environment. These threats may come from biological, chemical, physical, or radiological exposures. Sanitarians, like all public health officials, work to assess health threats, develop solutions, and assure results. You may more commonly know of us as "health inspectors". Sanitarians practice a science called "environmental health" which draws from physics, chemistry, biology, geology, human physiology, microbiology, etc... This is a science which is ideally practiced by scientifically trained and competent professionals exercising specialized skills, knowledge, and training to assure public safety.

Environmental health work is different than, and this is important, it is different than simple environmental monitoring or reporting. Environmental health work is not synonymous with mere environmentalism. Environmental health is unique because it is focused on applying science to protect human health.

In 1988, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conducted a study of the public health system in the US. This study concluded that the environmental public health workforce in the United States lacks the capacity to adequately address the new and emerging issues which would likely challenge the public health infrastructure in years to come. That study proved to be prophetic because in the two decades since we have witnessed new challenges from: E. coli O157:H7, West Nile virus, Lyme Disease, Hantavirus, bioterrorism, norovirus, radon, MRSA and others. Additionally, we're learning that many of the chronic diseases which plague our society have environmental precursors or causes. Challenges from global climate change promise to deliver further environmental health threats.

The Centers for Disease Control and the American Public Health Association have both gone on the record in numerous documents and they conclude that the environmental health workforce does not have the competency to meet our current public health

needs. They further conclude that licensure of sanitarians is perhaps the most effective and cost efficient way of regaining this competency. At least 17 other states have followed this advice and have enacted sanitarian licensure laws very similar to HB 6205. Those states are as diverse as Utah to Maryland and Texas to Illinois.

The Michigan Environmental Health Association has studied the issue of competency in Michigan and has found the following problems:

- There are no standards or minimum criteria to practice environmental health in the State of Michigan. We think the citizens of this state would be surprised and disappointed by this.
- There are no requirements mandating continuing education for environmental health professionals.
- Retirements and staffing reductions will continue to diminish the expertise and capacity of Michigan's environmental health workforce. These challenges exacerbate the need for a dynamic competent workforce.
- Very few new hires have specific environmental public health education. These recruits come from a variety of science programs and are unlikely to understand the interdisciplinary nature of environmental health science. It is important for these professionals to develop and demonstrate competency.
- There is no regulatory framework establishing accountability for malpractice or misuse of the protected Registered Sanitarian or RS titles.

The Michigan Public Health Code identifies 24 public health occupations. 23 of those occupations have been recognized as sufficiently essential to the wellbeing of the citizens of the state to warrant licensure. Those licensed occupations include a broad array of professions ranging from doctors to massage therapists, marriage counselors, and athletic trainers. It is indisputable that licensure has increased the overall quality of those licensed professions. The one occupation which does not have licensure is the one which safeguards our water, food, shelter, recreational sites, and daycare centers. The sanitarian.

The Michigan Environmental Health Association is the association which represents our profession throughout the state. Our membership includes sanitarians employed by local health departments, state agencies, and in various private capacities. We support House Bill 6205 because:

1. This bill is good for public health. Professionals who have demonstrated competency in their field are much more likely to practice it at a higher level of quality.
2. Because this bill would create a requirement for continuing education. Professionals who are required to remain current in their field are much more likely to be able to address new and emerging environmental health threats.
3. This bill would create regulatory oversight and accountability for the environmental health profession and protection of the Sanitarian title.

As proposed, this bill would:

- Mandate licensure for all qualifying sanitarians. Individuals doing de minimis environmental work, or non-regulatory work limited to one or two aspects of environmental health would be exempt from licensure.
- Protect the sanitarian title, and all like titles, from misuse
- Establish the National Environmental Health Association's Registered Environmental Health Specialist exam as the standard for licensure. This is the exam which our state is currently using for the voluntary registration program.
- Provide a very reasonable timeline – a total of 7 years - for all of the currently unregistered sanitarians to pass the exam and meet the requirement
- Requires sanitarians to achieve a minimum of 24 hours of continuing education every two years
- But most importantly, this proposal will *better protect the citizens of Michigan from environmental public health threats!*

The environmental health profession supports this bill and we hope that you will too. In either case, I appreciate your attention. Thank you.